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THE RELATION OF ART TO THE PUBLIC WELFARE

READ AT A MEETING OF THE CHICAGO WOMAN'S CLUB

I am glad that it occurred to your committee to ask me to join you this morning in a consideration of the theme, "The Relation of Art to the Public Welfare," because I believe with all my heart in the vitality and beneficence of that relation. What I have to say about architecture in particular grows naturally and inevitably out of a sort of creed about art that has been gradually formulating itself in my mind; and I can make my meaning clear most easily by briefly stating some of the articles of that creed. You will pardon me if the foundation seem at first over large. An architect early learns that without an ample foundation no superstructure will stand.

The vitality of the relation of art to the public welfare is grounded on the fact that keen thirst for the satisfaction of the sense of beauty is an ineradicable instinct of the human race. Side by side with the idea of God, the sense of beauty dawned in primal man; the one feeling expressed itself in worship, and religion sprang up; the other feeling found no adequate expression until man began to seek to endow the work of his own hands with the charm he felt in nature, and in this effort art was born. From that day whatever delight men have found in nature itself—a delight increasing in keenness with the flight of time—they have never been content with what nature gave, and have persistently sought to add beauty to all that they made or did or thought, have sought to create and to enjoy something more subtle than mere use, have shaped their utilities to ideal ends.

In those early times when man was living in small tribal or communal organizations, a simple life, in which he co-operated with nature only in the use of her more primary and obvious processes, art was less vital to him, and the failure to create beauty and to express his ideal brought a less heavy penalty of deprivation on the individual and on the community. For man's vocations and avocations were so uniformly pursued in the immediate presence of out-of-door nature that she could more measurably fill his life and satisfy his thirst for beauty. Always over him were sky and cloud and sun and star; always around him were tree and flower and beast and bird; and ever to his ear spake the tempest and the thunder or the still small voice of the errant breeze, or the innumerable voices of the forest and the field.

But man was not content; and amid this lovely setting of nature his restless spirit drove him to adorn his hut, his weapons, his tools, and his own person, and to collect or to fashion forms whose sole use to him was the beauty which he saw in them. Step by step he advanced over the long road that stretched from the rough carving on a bone to the winged victory, from the rude scrawl on a rock to the Sistine Madonna, from an adobe hut to the Parthenon. And at every step of this weary road, builded by the travail of millions of men through a myriad of years, man has found a large part of his reward and of his inspiration in his pursuit of beauty.

Man's religion has given him fortitude to endure and faith to dare; his reason has taught him justice and brought him power. But splendid as a creature is in the possession of fortitude, faith, justice, and power, these alone cannot give a man happiness; and without happiness, the splendid creature were less than a man. Next to the reverent love of a man for a woman, the love of the parent for the child, next to that which centers for man in what the American means by the word home, stands as a source of happiness the satisfaction of the sense of beauty.

Man is no more to be distinguished from the brute by the fact that he worships and that he reasons, than by the fact that, loving beauty, he seeks by art to gratify that love. Without art man is imperfect, his life incomplete; without art his happiness is limited, the thirst of his soul unsatisfied. In the great march of the nations toward a perfect civilization, one race has forged ahead in reverence, another in justice, another in knowledge, another in power, another in art; but the nation that gathers these all up into one co-ordinated whole is the nation toward which civilization tends, wherein the complete man shall live nobly and happily.

Architecture is the art of creating beautiful buildings. And how largely it has held man's thought, how deeply it has touched his heart, how great a part it has played in the upward trend of the race toward a more spiritual happiness is evidenced the more clearly, the more closely we scan the record. Think for a moment of England! With what keen delight you saw the splendid Houses of Parliament, the low masses of some cathedral, the arches of some timeworn cloister, the gray walls of some sturdy castle, the half-timbered house of some worthy squire, a village street whose outpushing gables saluted one another across the way, the homely beauty of some thatched cottage by the road. Out from among things commonplace they stand dominant in their beauty. Go where you will on the face of the earth; wherever man dwells or has left a record, the testimony is the same. Normandy, Touraine, Provence, Andalusia, Nuremberg, Venice, Athens, Thebes,—all alike possess the charm. To feel this delight is not the peculiar privilege of the connoisseur of to-day. It would have been far easier for the builders to achieve mere bald



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utility, a safe shelter from sun or storm or foe. They chose rather to strive to add beauty to material utility, to achieve a utility for the spirit as well as for the body, impelled thereto by a great fundamental passion of the soul; and across the intervening centuries their spirits speak to our spirits through the beauty which they expressed in their architecture.

We stand in a time when every evidence seems to indicate that for generations to come men are to live more and more largely in huge cities such as the world has never before seen; that, within the city, enormous masses of men are to spend practically their entire lives from the cradle to the grave. Of what sort are those lives to be? Turn your thought to the average man and to the poorer man of the city of to-day; to the man whose hours are spent so uniformly in the inevitable routine of complicated modern life, whose ears are assailed by horrid noises, whose sky is veiled in smoke, whose eyes are blinded by filthy dust or smitten by the gross ugliness of the structures that stand as monuments of indifference or of greed; to the man who only meets the beauty of nature first-hand on some rare holiday, who has forgotten to delight in the sunrise and in the depths of the starry heaven, and whose sole conception of clouds is that of some obscure connection with the weather that his newspaper saves him the trouble of forecasting. Consider the man of the city of to-day, so surrounded by influences that tend to deaden his sense of beauty, so environed by the rank outgrowths of the vigorous new industrialism, so largely cut off from nature, and, for his happiness, so much more dependent on art than was ever free man in the world before.

If the man of the city of to-day is to be the complete man, the happy man, he must have something more than bread and shelter for himself and family, a pleasure higher than animal pleasure; his benumbed sense of beauty must be stimulated and his need for beauty satisfied by art; and the city of to-day must become the city beautiful. The buildings which line its streets or dominate its parks and open spaces must one and all be beautiful buildings; for whether or no the citizen attends the concert or visits the museum or sees the play, the streets of the city are his daily paths, the buildings along the way are an unavoidable and commanding part of his environment, and it is his right and his need that they be beautiful. Their beauty will be diverse in kind as befits the ownership and the purpose of the structure. We must learn that the beauty of a building depends foremost on its masses and proportions, secondly on its coloring, and thirdly on its detail and its ornament; and that this most essential beauty of massing is possible for the simplest and cheapest structure that should be allowed on the city street. Within limits this is likewise true of coloring; absence of color effect is unnecessary; abuse should be impossible.

The beauty of proportion aided by color is the appropriate beauty

for the dwelling of the average citizen; undue striving for abundance of detail or richness of ornament would be both inappropriate and fatal to the beauty sought. The office building, the store, the warehouse, the factory, must each have its proper beauty; for the office building and store, dignity or grace; for the warehouse, dignity and severe beauty; for the factory, effective massing and pleasing color—simplicity if need be, or even picturesqueness where use and location permit. The slovenly or ugly or brutal factory or warehouse or shop, the dowdy or grotesque store, the goods-box or cliff-dwelling office building, are sins against the beauty of life and the rightful joy in toil.

(The man who argues that, of necessity, commerce is robbery by craft and business outwitting by cunning, may be expected to decry the need of beauty in the buildings that shelter the criminals. With him we have no argument—he is a case of hopeless atavism. But, when those who believe in the beneficence of commerce condone the ugliness of the city, there is need for and hope in a gospel of beauty.)

Those buildings which men unite to build for social and religious purposes,—such as the church, the theater, the museum, the college, the club house and the like,—are representative of the higher life of the community, and stand on a different footing from the home and the factory. To them, properly belong, after their kind, not only proportioned masses and effective coloring, but likewise richness of color, elaboration of detail, or even profusion of ornament.

The average citizen will have but narrow private means, and the beauty of his home will be in its modest forms, its studied simplicity, its well-bred restraint; but every citizen is a shareholder in the commonwealth, and by his citizenship becomes a part of all that the city is, of all that the city does. Through his citizenship his narrow means become wealth, his individual strength becomes a mighty power, his limited life becomes rounded and complete, his larger ideals realized; and for him the city must make beautiful in the fullest sense every building that the commonwealth erects. The council chamber, the library, the school, the hospital, the postoffice, the buildings that shelter the water, fire, police and kindred service, should all represent and express, in their proper kind and degree, the dignity, the power, the wealth, the beneficence of the community. To dignity and proportion they should add richness of color and of ornament; to grace of form they should add charm of detail; to simplicity they should add elegance of materials and of treatment. The city of the future will express itself in buildings worthy of the free citizen, fit to arouse and to satisfy his pride, and to kindle and to sustain his enthusiasm.

In the city of the future there will be open spaces at the intersections of the principal streets and about representative buildings. In these spaces will stand monuments representative of the achievement,

the life, and the faith of the city; the statues of the men who, by acts or thoughts of exceptional nobility, have deserved well of their fellows,—of the soldier, the statesman, the philanthropist, the student, the artist, the poet; and not only of the poet and artist who have portrayed human life, but also of those who have brought to us fresh messages from the outer older world, who have called forth and renewed our love of mountain, vale, and sea, of trees, and fields and clouds, and of all that charms in nature's joyous realm. Not in the parks only, but in the busy market-place and the streets where the thronging crowds jostle let these latter stand, mutely reminding the citizen of the beauty of the world and of the happiness it offers to the attentive soul. As for the former let them in their eternal calm recall us from our fevered haste for self to true and generous thoughts and brave and honest deeds. Then shall the life of the free citizen be made more noble and more happy in the city beautiful whose cleanly streets, unveiled sky and beautiful buildings shall form the harmonious environment of ordered and beautiful lives. For in the end it will appear that strenuous living and beautiful living spring from kindred roots, and that he who would build up the perfect man must preach two gospels: the gospel of reverence and righteousness and duty; the gospel of love and beauty and happiness.

We live in a city of extraordinary contradictions, a city teeming with possibilities for good and for evil. Let us not overlook its great need of the gospel of beauty; let us each preach and exemplify this gospel, so far as in us lies.

A. B. POND.



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